

COLGATE & COMPANY JERSEY CITY PLANT: B-5
(Colgate-Palmolive Company Jersey City Plant: B-5)
39 York Street
Jersey City
Hudson County
New Jersey

HAER No. NJ-71-H

HAER
NJ
9-JERC,
18H-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Northeast Area Office
National Park Service
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

COLGATE & COMPANY JERSEY CITY PLANT: B-5
(Colgate-Palmolive Company Jersey City Plant: B-5)

HAER No. NJ-71-H

Location: 39 York Street, Jersey City, New Jersey

Present Owner/Occupant: Colgate-Palmolive Company
300 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10022

Present Use: Demolished March 1989.

Significance: B-5 was significant as one of the oldest and most decorative Colgate & Company structures surviving in 1988 with original fabric, and as the oldest surviving structure built for laundry soap manufacture. Located in the Exchange Place area of Jersey City, the structure was part of B Block, the oldest part of the Jersey City plant and the heart of Colgate soap manufacture. The brick-bearing building was characteristic of mid-to- third-quarter 19th-century industrial design which utilized Italianate features, and was one of several such structures built along the south side of York Street at this time. The decorative features on the five story soap- producing building were confined to the exterior masonry, and included a granite basement level, round- and segmentally-arched window openings, brick buttress strips supported by brownstone brackets, and a dentillated brick entablature. The structure was modified several times for manufacturing purposes, but retained much of its original character. It was demolished in early 1989.

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Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION*

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection: Available data are inconclusive, and suggest two possibilities. B-5 (then Building C, and later Building F)) may have been built as a four-story structure c1858-66, with a fifth floor added c1872-79, or the five-story structure replaced the four-story one c1872-79 (cf. Hudson County Deed Books 1854, 1858; Culver 1866; Washington Fire Insurance Company of New York 1872; Hopkins 1873; Farrier 1879; see I.B below).
2. Architects, Builders, Contractors: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owner(s): Colgate & Company; Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company; Colgate-Palmolive Company (Hudson County Deed Books 1854, 1858).
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown
5. Original plans and construction: No original plans survive. The earliest photograph located to date, taken c1879, shows B-5 with a north exterior more or less identical to the one demolished in 1989.
6. Alterations and additions: The skylight or headhouse described below (II.B.7) was probably added in 1895. There were many undocumented episodes of structural reinforcement, stairway changes, and movement of fixed tanks and other equipment in the 20th century. In the 1960s, shop space was added to the third floor including a rear extension, flooring on at least the fifth floor was replaced, and an additional storage tank placed on the roof.

B. Historical context:

Colgate & Company purchased the site of B-5 in 1854 and 1858. By 1866, the firm had erected a four-story building for storage, soap pressing, and candle manufacture. The structure of c1858-66 had about the same exterior dimensions as B-5. Since the beginnings of a fancy or toilet soap factory had by this time been erected on Creene Street (cf. HAER No. NJ-71-0), it is likely that the four-story structure was first used to process laundry soap (Culver 1866; Washington Fire Insurance Company of New York 1872). By 1879, the five-story structure later known as B-5 was on this site. An undocumented

* Capitalized references are photographs included with this documentation, or with other documentation packages for HAER No. NJ-71 and associated structures.

1878 fire at the Colgate plant may have damaged or destroyed the four-story structure, prompting the creation of B-5 as a repair or replacement project (Colgate-Palmolive Company n.d.).

The building was used for laundry bar soap manufacture until c1970, notably for production of OCTACON (see HAER No. NJ-71, OCTAGON SOAP WRAPPING AND PACKING LINES c1913, VIEW NORTHEAST ON THIRD FLOOR...), and probably had facilities for all steps in laundry-soap making after kettle house work in B-3 (HAER No. NJ-71-F; Cusick 1931; Crooker 1931). B-5 also served for the production or storage of alkali used in kettle soap making. By the early 1920s, the lower (two?) floors were equipped with blenders, hoppers, and other equipment for finishing of powdered laundry soap (FAB) and soap bead products (see HAER No. NJ-71, FAB FILLING AND PACKING LINES, c1922-28, VIEW SOUTHEAST ON FIRST FLOOR...). After World War II, Colgate-Palmolive used the lower two floors for blending and packaging industrial detergents and cleansers, devoting the entire building to this purpose or related storage by c1980.

Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General statement

1. Architectural character: B-5 was a five-story, Italianate-influenced, brick-bearing, wood-framed structure with wood floors. One of the most aesthetically pleasing buildings in the Colgate complex, B-5 featured a ten-bay exterior with a tri-partite horizontal division of spaces into base, body and attic, a pronounced granite basement, round- and segmentally-arched windows, and a mansard roof with five gabled dormers. The detailing of the arches was identical to that of B-4 (HAER No. NJ-71-G).
2. Condition of fabric: When demolished in 1989, the structure was in very good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 59 by 100 feet, oriented north-south.
2. Foundations: Masonry piers and cast iron columns. The masonry piers were of brick laid in common bond, with 4-inch-thick bluestone belt courses and 14.5-inch-thick granite block caps. The granite blocks intersected with 12-by-18-inch wood girders; the 14.5-by-4-inch wood floor joists rested in wall joist pockets on inset bluestone ledges. A variety of cast iron columns supported the building: plain iron columns with square bases and girder saddles; Doric columns complete with capital, saddle, plain square bases and entasis; dolphin tail columns; and bollard-shaped columns with separate girder plates. (DETAIL OF BOLLARD-SHAPED COLUMN AND MASONRY PIER IN BASEMENT, VIEW NORTHWEST).

3. Walls: B-5 was a five-story-plus-basement, brick-bearing industrial building with walls between about 1.5 and 1 foot thick. The York Street exterior was characterized by a ten-bay facade, with a tri-partite horizontal division of spaces created by belt coursing between the first and second stories and the third and fourth stories. The corners of the building were emphasized by brick wall buttresses supported by brownstone brackets and topped with a brownstone coping. At the top of the structure, these buttresses formed the edges of a brick entablature. The basement of the structure consisted of three courses of rough-faced gray granite block finished with a smooth edge. The coursing was sloped to accommodate the downward street slope easterly, towards the river. All of the windows in B-5 were original 4/4 double hung wood frame sash, either round arched or segmentally arched as on the third floor. The fifth floor dormers were 1/1 round arched double hung windows. The moulding of the window jambs stepped back twice to give the appearance of a deeper inset. A mysterious iron trivet-like ornament was attached to the brick pier between the third and fourth window bays from the east on the second floor. The same basic window arrangements were originally carried to the rear of the building, but this south wall was entirely undecorated (HAER No. NJ-71, B-4 (RIGHT) AND B-5 NORTH ELEVATIONS; EAST HALF OF B BLOCK, VIEW EAST [B-5 is second brick structure from left, at center]).

Originally there were six basement level windows. The first floor consisted of six round-arched windows and a large round-arched entrance in the third bay from the east, which at some point was filled in with mismatched brick. A freight entrance with overhead door was inserted in the seventh and eighth bays from the east. The second floor consisted of ten round arched windows. The round masonry arches of the first and second floors had flat gauged brick arches springing from bluestone blocks. Inside these arches, which were flush with the wall surface, were deeper, narrower inset arches resulting in a dramatic shadow line. The bluestone springing block continued into the protruding corner pilasters. The sills of the second floor windows were continuous, creating a belt course separating the two lower stories. The piers between the second and third, fifth and sixth, and eighth and ninth bays were slightly wider than the remaining piers to accommodate the interior support columns. The third floor treatment was simpler, with segmentally arched windows, flat gauged arches without the inset interior arch, and discontinuous bluestone sills (HAER No. NJ-71, B-4 (RIGHT) AND B-5 NORTH ELEVATIONS).

Above the third floor windows was the continuous bluestone belt course of the fourth floor window sills. The fourth floor windows, which decreased in width, were identically detailed to those of the second floor. The brick entablature above the fourth floor had paired fillets with billet course in between for the architrave, a plain blank frieze, and two fillets and a dentil course for the cornice. The entire entablature was capped off with a stone coping and copper flashing.

The fifth floor was an asphalt sheet-covered mansard roof pierced by five steeply pitched gabled dormers. Detailed with continuous stone bases and springing blocks, the round arched windows were 1/1 double hung wood sash, set in single-flush round-arched masonry openings with no inset arches. The wood roofs had open eaves with exposed rafters. The top of the mansard roof was edged in an open, old and broken wooden guard rail.

4. Structural systems, framing: B-5 was a brick bearing structure with wood floors, and cast iron and wood columns arranged in rows of three east-west and five north-south. These columns were selectively reinforced over time, as the needs of the machinery and equipment housed within dictated. For instance, on the fifth floor, where a two-story equipment headhouse was inserted on the roof, a wood and steel supporting platform was constructed. This involved strengthening existing columns by bolting on additional wooden members on either side (third and fourth column from the north, first and second from the east), and by adding some wood posts. The southernmost row of columns was also reinforced by the addition of a 9-by-9-inch member 4.5 inches from the original 15.5-by-9.5-inch wood column: this was done on all the floors. The original wood columns on the first three floors were replaced with cast iron members (FIRST FLOOR TO SOUTH; FIFTH FLOOR TO SOUTHEAST; DETAIL OF FIFTH FLOOR SUPPORTS FOR SKYLIGHT STRUCTURE, TO NORTHWEST).
5. Rear Extension: A steel-framed, concrete-walled, flat-roofed, 40-by-16-foot windowless extension spanned the distance between B-5 and B-9 (HAER No. NJ-71-K) behind the third floor rear wall, along the east half of B-5 and a small portion of B-6 (HAER No. NJ-71-I). The extension, part of a maintenance shop added c1964, was accessed through the third floor of B-5, and via an exterior stair below from the second floor.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The freight bay, located in the seventh and eighth bays from the east on the north side, was the only usable exterior door on the structure. The street level pedestrian entrance, located in the third bay from the east of the ground floor, was brick infilled.

- b. Windows: The original windows were round- and segmentally-arched 4/4 wood double-hung windows on all the floors except for the fifth, where the windows were 1/1. Prior to its demolition, B-5 had all but one of its original street facade windows intact (fifth floor, fourth bay from the east had been boarded up). Many original rear windows were bricked in. When first built, the east wall of B-5 also had windows; all were thoroughly removed and bricked in when adjacent B-6 (HAER No. NJ-71-I) was built.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The asphalt-sheet-clad mansard roof did not end in a flat deck, but rather dipped beyond the street-visible roof ridge to form a shallow "V"-shaped valley. A shed roof with a gradual incline then rose to the south of the structure, and became the base for an equipment headhouse or skylight structure inserted on the roof. The lowest point on the roof was about 30.7 feet from the north side of the building.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Brick entablature (see Section II.B.3).
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: The fifth floor was punctuated by five steeply pitched, gabled brick dormers with wood roofs, open eaves and exposed rafters.

A one- and two-story, wood frame, tin-clad, gambrel-roof headhouse or skylight was located on the roof. This structure, added c1895, was 31.5 feet north-south by 18.5 feet. It housed tanks on several levels, and was accessed via a door on the roof and steps from the fifth floor below (HAER No. NJ-71, EAST HALF OF B BLOCK, VIEW EAST). An undated, adjacent, box-like roof structure was removed sometime after c1922 (Associated Mutual Insurance Company 1922).

C. Description of interior:

- 1. Floorplans: The overall plan of each of the floors was an open rectangle broken up by three-by-five cast iron or wood columns. There was only one interior stairway, located mid-way along the north facade of the building. A small, undated elevator near the northeast corner was removed sometime after 1906. Interior access was through the building; four doors connecting B-5 with B-6 were located in the east wall, and a single door in the west wall connected to B-4. All interior doors were heavy, metal-clad fire doors (FIRST FLOOR TO SOUTHEAST; see HAER No. NJ-71-D, Figure 2).

COLGATE & COMPANY JERSEY CITY PLANT: B-5
(Colgate-Palmolive Company Jersey City Plant: B-5)
HAER No. NJ-71-H (Page 7)

- a. Second Floor: A wooden partition in the second bay from the north, third bay from the east, housed a dry blender used in industrial cleanser manufacture. A cinder-block-partitioned water closet was located in the rear middle bay.
 - b. Third Floor: The southernmost two bays became a maintenance shop for bar soap and liquid detergent manufacturing equipment c1964, and were enclosed by a wooden partition wall. The shop adjoined the rear toilet-and-locker-room addition, noted above, via two doors created in original rear window openings. There were also some wood-partitioned office spaces along the east wall of the this floor.
 - c. Fifth Floor: Supports and access for the headhouse structure interrupted the typical floorplan (FIFTH FLOOR TO SOUTHEAST; DETAIL OF FIFTH FLOOR SUPPORTS FOR SKYLIGHT STRUCTURE, TO NORTHWEST).
2. Stairways: There was one interior stairway, located mid-way along the north wall of the building. This stair was of wood and was a later addition to the original structure.
 3. Flooring: The original wooden floors were reinforced with metal plates. In the third floor maintenance shop, the floor was coated with rubber-like asphalt. Original basement floors were brick, later covered in most places with concrete.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: All of the brick walls and wood ceilings had painted surfaces.
 5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Heavy metal-clad fire doors.
 - b. Windows: Surviving original windows had simple wooden casings edged with a slight quirk and wood sills.
 6. Hardware, decorative features and trim: None.
 7. Manufacturing and mechanical equipment: In 1988, the basement included three modern steam pumps (two duplex, one tandem compound duplex) and an associated steel condensing tank. This equipment was most recently used to move neat soap from two 6.5-foot-diameter tanks on the rear of the roof to toilet soap finishing areas in B-14 (HAER No. NJ-71-N). Other remaining equipment in B-5 were, for the most part, fragments of the partly gravity-fed, industrial cleanser-making processes most recently in place on all floors of B-5. These pieces included tanks in the headhouse above a hopper on the fifth floor, a blower on the fourth floor, a blender on the second floor, and

hoppers and tubes on the first floor leading to filling lines removed by 1988. Holes through floors accommodated much of this equipment (FIRST FLOOR TO SOUTH; FOURTH FLOOR TO NORTHEAST; DETAIL OF FIFTH FLOOR SUPPORTS FOR SKYLIGHT STRUCTURE, TO NORTHWEST; DETAIL OF SKYLIGHT STRUCTURE INTERIOR, TO SOUTHEAST).

D. Site

B-5 was part of the picturesque streetscape of the north side of B Block, dominated by mid-to-late 19th century pedestrian scale brick industrial buildings. Sandwiched between buildings B-4 and B-6 (HAER Nos. NJ-71-G and NJ-71-I), B-5 was located approximately mid-block. The rear of the structure faced the crowded interior of B Block, a jumble of utilitarian storage and maintenance facilities (HAER No. NJ-71, EAST HALF OF B BLOCK, VIEW EAST).

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings:

Colgate-Palmolive Company retains linen or blueprint copies of most, though not all, 20th-century plans and drawings made for B-5; only one 19th century drawings have survived. Drawings listed below pertain to the structure and major equipment elements; some other plans of operating hardware are not listed. As of late 1989, these documents are maintained by the engineering department in the plant's L Block (HAER No. NJ-71-SS). Future researchers should contact the company's Office of Corporate Communications at 300 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10022, for access.

Colgate & Company/Colgate-Palmolive Company	
1895	Skylight Over Tanks in Laundry Soap Department/F Building. Dwg. No. 2-1100.
1903	Pickle Mill Foundation/Building F (2 drawings): [plan and longitudinal section] Dwg. No. 2-2215. [section and elevation] Dwg. No. 2-2213
1906	5th Floor Plan "F" Building. Dwg. No. 2-1152.
1962	Floor PL Layout/5th Floor/Building B-5. Dwg. No. 2-4847.
1963	Layout of Bar Soap & Liquid Filling Area Shops in B-5-3. Dwg. No. 2-4944.
1966	New Base Head Tank Installation. Dwg. No. 2-5361.
n.d.	Renovate Floor/B-5-5 [c1979]. Dwg. No. 2-8164.

B. Historic Views:

A few late-19th or early 20th-century photographs of the north side of B Block show B-5, the most accessible of which appears on page 172 of Farrier 1879 (cited below). The north exterior remained unchanged, so these views provide little new information. All known aerial views of the plant were taken from the southeast, and tended to hide the B-5 roof behind the higher B-7 and B-8 building to the east (HAER No. NJ-71-J).

C. Interview:

Colgate-Palmolive Company plant engineer Theodore Mrowzinski provided some information on recent neat soap handling equipment in B-5.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Colgate-Palmolive Company

n.d. Memorable Dates. Printed mss., on file Colgate-Palmolive
Company Office of Corporate Communications.

Hudson County Deed Books

1854 Vol. 41, p. 8.

1858 Vol. 70, p. 175.

Washington Fire Insurance Company of New York

1872 Policy of Insurance No. 2288, May 15, 1872. Original in
possession of Carter Litchfield, Kemblesville, PA.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Associated Mutual Insurance Company

1922 Colgate & Co. (Soap and Toilet Supplies). Surveyed November 8,
1922.

Culver, I.B.

1866 Map of Jersey City. On file, New York Public Library.

Farrier, George H.

1879 Centennial Celebration of the Battle of Paulus Hook, August
19th, 1879... Jersey City: M. Mullone.

Hopkins, G.M., & Co.

1873 Combined Atlas of the State of New Jersey and the County of
Hudson. Philadelphia.

Jersey City directory 1855-56, on file, Jersey City Public Library.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Building permit records maintained by Colgate-Palmolive Company and/or the City of Jersey City may have information on some 20th-century alterations to B-5, but will probably add little data not noted somewhere on available plans and drawings.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Colgate-Palmolive Company began phasing out its Jersey City operations in 1985, moving them to other company plants. In 1987, the company announced plans to demolish the plant beginning in 1988, and to redevelop the 34-acre site for mixed commercial, residential, and commercial use. Recognizing the plant's historic significance, Colgate-Palmolive donated historical, descriptive, and photographic data on the office building to the Historic American Engineering Record.

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COLGATE & COMPANY JERSEY CITY PLANT: B-5
 (Colgate-Palmolive Company Jersey City Plant: B-5)
 HAER No. NJ-71-H (Page 11)

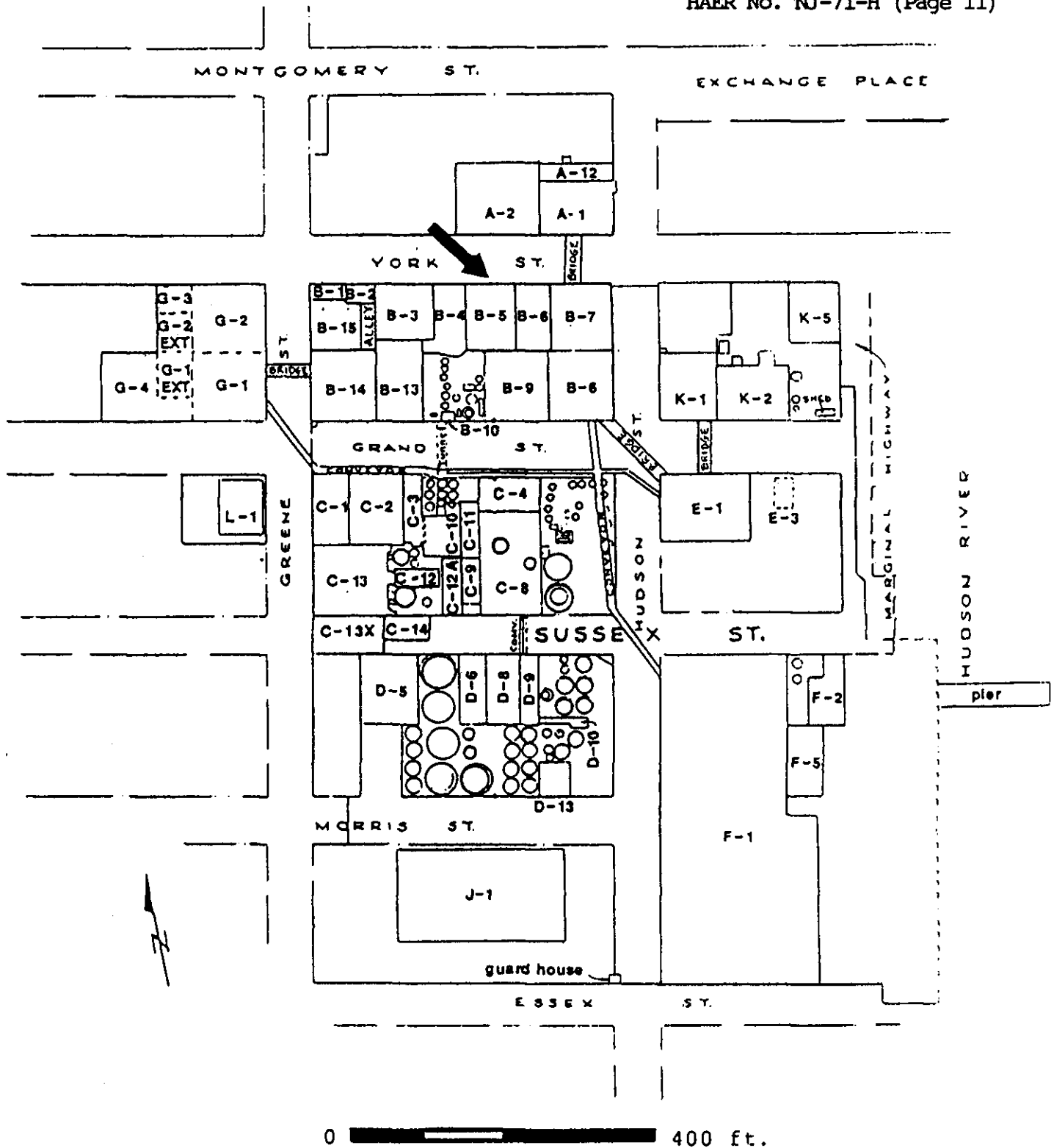


Figure 1. LOCATION OF B-5 AT COLGATE JERSEY CITY PLANT